Ralph and Daisy

by Brooks Kohler

"Man, I wish I hadn't gave up drinkin'."

The old truck was faded blue, and in the thick weeds of the pasture, it stuck out like a sore thumb. Rust was beginning to settle around the tire wells. The bed was dented and scratched. The windshield had a long slivering crack. On the dash were discarded cigarette boxes and colored receipts. Ralph was kicked back, slouched down behind the steering wheel. His blue jeans were greasy and weatherworn. His t-shirt was stained with the remnants of a gas station sandwich. He was tired, beat, and completely fed up with life, but Daisy was beside him, wearing nothing more than a pair blue jean cutoffs and a pink tank top. She had recently painted her toes. She had them on the dash and was wiggling them about, her hands cradling an ice cold PBR. Ralph loved Daisy and turned to look at her. It was hot, muggy, and the evening sun was going down, but she looked like an angel, glowing in the shadows, all glistening with sweat and deep in a thought.

"You wish I was drinkin'. Don't ya?" he asked.

"No," replied Daisy.

"You don't?"

"No."

"Why? I was a lot of fun back then."

"Yes, but you also got fired for showin' up late and drinkin' on the job."

"Yeah, I did," he said, reaching for a pack of

cigarettes. "That boss was a real dandy, but I was still fun, drunk or sober. Now, I'm just nothin'."

"Yeah, you were fun, but you don't need that. You're better now, and that's what matters."

"Yeah. I guess you're right," he said, shrugging off the temptation to reply, but he was thinking about having one of them cold ones. It was on his mind more, now that summer had arrived. All the guys were staggering around with blood shot eyes and not a care in the world, not even a worry about bank overdrafts, which, since losing his job, was happening to Ralph on a weekly basis. When he was drunk, life seemed simpler, more at ease, but being sober was time consuming, almost more time consuming than staying drunk. He looked at Daisy and grinned, but each time she took a sip, he could almost taste it.

"You look good," he said.

"Well, thanks," she replied.

Daisy was tan, from her bottom to her top. Back at the farm, she walked around nude. She did everything in the buff: the dishes, the laundry, the yard. Their house was well off the beaten path, a mile back in the hills on the farm that Ralph's daddy left him. At one time, Ralph's father owned up to five hundred acres, but years of bad farming and poor decisions forced him to sell off the land piece by piece. When he died, Ralph was left with only fourteen acres and five of those he sold just to

pay for the funeral. It was all a mess, and now the county was on to him for back taxes. Ralph thought about it from time to time. He thought about grabbing his unregistered Winchester and going down to the courthouse and facing down any rotten son of a bitch who was making his life a living hell. He was perplexed by the cost of life. It was tugging at his soul, but then again, so was Daisy.

"You think I'm gettin' fat?" asked Daisy.

"Fat?"

"Yeah." She raised up her shirt and pinched her belly. "Do ya?"

Ralph shifted in his seat. "Hell no!" he shouted. "I think you're skinnier then a pig's pecker." Daisy laughed. Ralph continued, "Why do you think you're gettin' fat?"

"Because," she said, pleading, "I was tryin' on some pants the other day and they just don't fit anymore."

"Well, that doesn't mean you're gettin' fat. Clothes sometimes change."

"Really?"

"Yeah. I got a hat I can't wear anymore. It's that Pioneer hat they gave me for buying a pallet of herbicide. In fact, I have a couple, but I doubt my head has gotten any bigger."

"Maybe you just need a haircut," said Daisy, taking a sip of her beer.

"Yeah," replied Ralph. "Maybe." He looked out

the window. "I never thought of that," he continued, reaching for a pack of cigarettes.

Ralph used to smoke Marlboro Reds, but since losing his job, he switched to an off name brand. He missed the taste of full flavor almost as much as he did an ice cold beer. All he could do was remember, and it bothered him that he had to. Everything that made life worth living was being stripped away from him.

"John Lee got that job," he said.

"Really."

"Yeah."

"What is it again?"

"He's workin' at that porno place out by Sounders."

"Oh, yeah." Daisy thought deeply for a few moments. She took a sip and then perked up. "Why don't we ever go to the porno shop?"

"I don't know. I guess we have no need to."

He grinned.

"Well, I might have a need."

"A what?"

"Well, I'm just sayin'."

"What the hell? Daisy! Are you sayin' you don't like my pecker?"

"No."

"Then why on earth would you want to go to the porno store?"

"Cause I've never been."

"Well, you've never been to Disney Land either, but we ain't plannin' to go there. Besides..."

"Besides what?"

"That's where all them faggots and child molesters hang out."

"How do you know?"

"Cause who else would go there?"

"John Lee is," replied Daisy, with a snub. "He's goin' there."

"Yeah, well, that's because he has to. He's got a job to do."

"Yeah, selling porno to faggots and child molesters."

"Well, somebody has got to, and besides, he'd rather be working on the road crew, but the county's broke, and he's not union."

"Why's he not union?"

"I don't know."

The subject had to change. It was only making him angry. Ralph wanted nothing to do with what Daisy was talking about. She knew why John Lee had to find work. The county was broke. It had been broke for years, but only recently admitted it. The mayor of one small town was even under investigation by the IRS for tax evasion, and as a result of some squabble that happened over failing to pay, the union bosses had temporarily blacklisted the local highway chief. And, to make matters worse, the only jobs that were available

required a diploma from either the community college or a university, and those jobs were at the prison and with the state police. Ralph was definitely not going for that. So, he just kicked back, got quiet, and puffed away on his cigarette, thankful that Daisy did not smoke because it would cost a fortune to support her habit, too.

"Did you hear they arrested Leo?" asked Daisy.

"For meth?"

"Uh-huh"

"Yeah, I knew about that a year ago, along with everybody else, including the cops who busted him a week ago."

"Why you being like this?" she asked.

"Like what?"

"Like everything is my fault or somethin'?"

It got to him. He took a long drag and reached out to her. "You know I'm just tired of all this, don't ya."

"I guess," replied Daisy.

"Well, I am, and I'm sorry."

She focused her eyes on him, and without taking her eyes off him, raised the beer to her lips and took a long drink until the can was empty and she could do nothing but belch. He watched this with a sullen spirit.

"You have no reason to complain," he said.

"You're liver is seven years younger than mine. You got seven more years of fun. All I got are these el cheapo smokes."

Daisy opened the door and jumped out. She unsnapped her shorts, squatted, and made a funny face.

Ralph watched and took another drag.

"You know, Ralph. I like it here and all, but we should move or somethin'."

"Yeah. That's a thought. Where to?"

"I don't know. Maybe Texas. They got that show on cable about those guys who dig oil wells. You know, the one where the young dude is missing half his teeth. I've always wanted to go to Texas, Ralph.

We should do it."

"Oil wells, huh? Well, that would be a switch."

She jumped back in and climbed up onto his lap. "They make good money, Ralph. Beth's brother works down there."

"The half nigger kid?"

"Yup. He's a gopher."

"A what?"

"A gopher. He runs all over the place, gettin' things for people. You could do that."

"Well, thanks. I'm glad I'm qualified."

"That's not what I mean," she said, rolling her eyes. "He makes close to twenty an hour just for runnin' all over the place. You could do that and

more."

God bless, Daisy. She was so sweet. So sincere. She meant every word she was saying even if none of it was true.

"Well, let me think about it."

"Really?"

"Yeah. I got a buddy who's done some work down there. I'll see what he thinks, but I don't want to sell the farm," he ended sternly.

"We don't have to sell the farm, Ralph."

"That's right, baby! We may be poorer than dirt, but, dammit, this is America, and we're keepin' the farm."

The End

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This story is fiction. Similarities to any person living or deceased are coincidence.